



Statement of Bishop James Louis Jelinek, Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota
A Listening Session on the Federal Assault Weapons Ban
Congresswoman Betty McCollum and Representative Nora Slawik

June 8, 2004

Dear Congresswoman McCollum and Representative Slawik:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer a statement regarding the Federal Assault Weapons Ban renewal. I appreciate your support for this important legislation. I write today in the hope that we may become a society in which everyone wants to live.

"The hottest places in hell," wrote Dante Alighieri, the great Italian poet, "The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in times of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality."

This may not reflect the theology of many of the religious community here in Minnesota or around the country, but it raises for all of us and our society the consequences of neutrality in certain circumstances.

Similarly, Dag Hammarskjöld wrote in the middle of the last century: "Not to decide is to decide."

As the Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Minnesota, I want to express my strong support for critical gun safety law, the Federal Assault Weapons Ban.

In the book of Isaiah we see and hear the words, *I will appoint Peace as your overseer and Righteousness as your taskmaster. Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders: you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise* (Isaiah 60:17-18).

Today in our country there are some 250 million firearms—a gun for every adult in our nation. The Episcopal Church has expressed concerns regarding the proliferation of firearms in our society and through both our General Convention and our Executive Council, the church's policy making bodies at the national level, the Episcopal Church supports the ban on military assault weapons.

Many Episcopal dioceses around the country and many other religious leaders here in Minnesota and in other states also supported the passage of the Assault Weapons Ban in 1994, and have called on Congress to renew this law, which will expire on September 15, 2004. We in Minnesota were particularly active in our efforts to prevent concealed weapons from having as familiar a place in our sanctuaries as our prayer books and hymnals. Our families, friends and neighbors, many of whom are law enforcement officers, enjoy safer streets and communities as a result of the Assault Weapons Ban. It would be a travesty to see, once again, the broad availability of these dangerous weapons, simply because Congress failed to act, because if members of Congress fell victim to the peril of neutrality.

As someone who lives in your congressional district and voted for you because of your commitment for having such values, I want to applaud your holding this hearing by taking a stand on this important issue. It is absolutely absurd to imagine that any psychologically healthy human being in our society would have a need for an assault weapon. It is one thing to have a firearm for hunting; it is a bit more troublesome but understandable to have a firearm when concerned about self-protection. It is ludicrous for anyone to be armed with a weapon capable of mass destruction. On behalf of the Episcopal Church and the Episcopal 6th Province, which includes most of the upper Midwest of our country and as the President-elect of Minnesota Council of Churches and many other peoples of faith, I respectfully ask that you and your colleagues in the United States Congress do all you can to renew, and if possible strengthen, the Federal Assault Weapons Ban.

May God Bless you in your office and service for this country and humanity

Faithfully in Christ,
Sincerely,

The Right Reverend James Louis Jelinek